**Common Cognitive Errors Worksheet**

Because our brains have to deal with so much information, our brains often make little errors that have big effects on our choices and our moods. This worksheet is about some of those errors. All brains make all these errors, but each of us have a few errors that we make the most. Knowing those errors makes it easier to catch them, and then we can choose to think things over again without making them.

Here are a few cognitive errors and then some stories. In each story, find the cognitive errors that seem to be going on.

**Cognitive Errors**

*Catastrophizing* – Judging something based on the worst possible outcome

*All-or-nothing/black-and-white­* – Thinking about things as being either one extreme or the other rather than something in-between

*Mind-reading –* Making assumptions about what others are thinking and feeling

*Rationalizing –* The mind making a choice based on feelings and then looking around to find the evidence why that choice makes sense. (This is the opposite of reasoning – in reasoning we gather all the evidence and then we make a choice.)

*Awful-izing –* A person identifying something as something they don’t like (e.g., “awful”), and as a result rejecting it without weighing the pros and cons about it

**Stories**

Mark is meeting with his psychiatrist, Dr. Lucy, and asks her about increasing his anxiety medications. Dr. Lucy says that he is already on a pretty high dose, but that she will review it with him and see if it is appropriate. Mark thought to himself that “she thinks I am a complaining wimp that can’t handle anything.” Believing that thought, Mark tried to look “stronger” and did not share most of his anxiety symptoms with Dr. Lucy when they reviewed the symptoms and she did not increase his medication.

What cognitive error(s) did Mark fall into? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

A few years ago Lydia had a boss named Pat, until Pat moved to a different company. Now, Pat has called her and offered her a new job at the company he is now the head of. Lydia knows that Suzie works for that company, and she does not like being around Suzie. She turns down the job-offer without hearing about her potential pay, hours, or how much contact she would have with Suzie.

What cognitive error(s) can you see Lydia do here? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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It’s Bill’s 40th birthday. He has been a little insecure about entering his 40ies. His wife usually makes a big deal about his birthdays, showering him with attention and surprises. They are finishing up breakfast and he realizes that she has not said anything about the birthday. As they put their dishes in the dish-washer he has the thought: “She must have forgotten!” Expanding on that thought he says to her: “Why don’t you love me anymore?”

What cognitive error(s) do you think Bill has here? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Cathy gets depressed for several weeks in a row. At other times, she goes several days with high energy, hardly sleeping, making impulsive choices, and starting lots of projects. Her psychiatrist has told her that she has a bipolar disorder and will need to take mood stabilizers for the rest of her life. Cathy does not like the idea that she has a mental illness, and does not like medications. She searches the internet for information about bipolar disorder not being a real thing and about medications being bad. She does not look up information about what bipolar disorder really is, or how medications are important for it. She finds a few websites supporting her not taking medications. As a result, she chooses not to take her medications.

What cognitive error(s) do you think Cathy is engaging in? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

One day Chris is hanging out at the beach and notices a strange-looking mole on his leg. “That looks a little different,” he thinks. “I should get that checked out. That could be cancer.” “Crap, cancer… skin-cancer… that can be really bad… that can be deadly… and I bet I have been having that mole for some time. I don’t want to die… what is my wife going to do without me raising 3 little kids on her own? I knew I should have gotten that life insurance. My parents can’t fly here for a funeral…”

What cognitive error(s) do you think Chris is engaging in? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Self-Application**

Which cognitive error do you think causes the most problems for you? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Write about a time when that cognitive error caused problems: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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What would have been different if you had caught the cognitive error and stopped yourself from believing it? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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